

THIS MONTH

If you're one of the many people who bought a High Definition LCD TV at Christmas, you're probably wondering which HD format – Blu-ray or HD DVD – you should go with. This month we review Samsung's BD-P1000 Blu-ray player and Toshiba's HD-E1 HD DVD player in our Video section to help you make a decision.

If entertainment on your PC is more your thing, our Displays section will interest you. We've got two reviews of budget 19in widescreen monitors. Both models cost less than £150 and are well suited to either playing games or watching movies.

Our Components section has a head-to-head between Foxconn and ECS's Nvidia Nforce 680i-based motherboards. This brand-new chipset from Nvidia is making its debut for Intel processors, rather than AMD processors as the company's previous chipsets have done. Both high-end boards are perfect for the enthusiast wanting the best performance from a Core 2 Duo processor.

Our other sections are packed full with the usual wide range of products. So, no matter what you're interested in or what your budget is, we're bound to have something that will take your fancy.

David Ludlow
Deputy Editor

david@computershopper.co.uk



PC NEXTDAY Zoostorm 2-3305 Versatile PC

★★★★★

£518 inc VAT



Windows Vista is packed with useful features, but the retail version of Home Premium Edition costs around £200. You might expect that a dual-core PC with Vista Home Premium would be expensive, but PC Nextday's Zoostorm 2-3305 Versatile PC shows that this doesn't have to be the case. It comes with Vista Home Premium and an Intel Pentium D processor for under £520.

The Pentium D 820 processor isn't as fast as the latest Core 2 Duo chips, but it has two cores, and is still quick enough for most computing needs. The Zoostorm has 1GB of RAM, which helped it attain a respectable score of 164 in our video-encoding benchmark and 132 in our image-editing test.

Strangely, it was about 15 points slower than other similarly specified PCs in both our video-encoding and multitasking tests. We tested to rule out a hardware problem and re-ran our benchmarks under Windows XP with similar results, suggesting that the basic MicroATX motherboard might be a little slow. It's able to accommodate a faster Core 2 Duo processor, but has only two memory slots. Both are already filled so you'll have to get rid of one or both of the modules to add more memory.

The Zoostorm has a decent GeForce 7600GS graphics card that is easily capable of displaying transparent graphical effects in Vista's Aero interface. Its scores in our Doom 3 and Call of Duty 2 benchmarks show that it's not ideal for games, though. If you want to play the latest 3D games, you'll have to lower the resolution or graphical detail, or upgrade to a faster card. Still, there's more than enough 3D power here for older titles.

This month What's New Contents

					
PC Systems page 10	Handhelds page 22	Displays page 28			
Apple 24in iMac ★★★★★	Archos 404 Camcorder ★★★★★	AG Neovo K-A19 ★★★★★			
Evesham Solar Storm Plus ★★★★★	Navicore Personal 2007 ★★★★★	HannsG HW191DP ★★★★★			
PC Nextday Zoostorm 2-3305 Versatile PC ★★★★★	Nokia E61 ★★★★★	HP LP2065 ★★★★★			
PC Nextday Zoostorm 2-5404 Versatile PC ★★★★★	Sony Ericsson K800i ★★★★★	Iiyama X486S-B1 ★★★★★			
Shuttle mini X200M ★★★★★	Sony Ericsson W950i ★★★★★	LG 32LC2D ★★★★★			
Notebooks page 16	TomTom One Regional ★★★★★	NEC 175VXM+ ★★★★★			
Acer Aspire 3692WLMi ★★★★★	Printers & Scanners page 24	Samsung 215TW ★★★★★			
Apple MacBook ★★★★★	Canon PIXMA iP4300 ★★★★★	Samsung LE26R74BD ★★★★★			
Asus G2-17 ★★★★★	Canon PIXMA MP160 ★★★★★	Photography page 30			
PC Nextday Zoostorm 55-7701 ★★★★★	Canon Selphy CP720 ★★★★★	Canon Digital ixs i7 Zoom ★★★★★			
Rock Pegasus 665 ★★★★★	Dell Multifunction Laser Printer 1815dn ★★★★★	Canon EOS 400D ★★★★★			
Sony Vaio VGN-FE41E ★★★★★	Epson Perfection 4490 Photo ★★★★★	Casio Exilim Zoom EX-Z850 ★★★★★			
	Epson Perfection V100 Photo ★★★★★	Fujifilm FinePix F20 Zoom ★★★★★			
	HP Photosmart D7160 ★★★★★	Nikon Coolpix L4 ★★★★★			
	Konica Minolta Magicolor 2490MF ★★★★★	Nikon D40 ★★★★★			
	Konica Minolta Magicolor 5550 ★★★★★	Panasonic Lumix DMC-FX3 ★★★★★			
	Samsung ML-2510 ★★★★★	Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ50 ★★★★★			
		Pentax K100D ★★★★★			



Although the graphics card has a DVI output, the included 17in AOC monitor has only a D-sub input, so you'll need to fiddle with the settings for the best image quality. Although its colour and greyscale transitions looked surprisingly smooth for such an affordable monitor, white areas looked greyish, making it less than ideal for advanced photo-editing work. The stiff tilt and swivel action is also quite limited, so it's not easy to get an ideal working position.

The Genius keyboard and mouse are basic but comfortable to use. You'll want to replace the speakers if you listen to lots of music, though. Although surprisingly loud, they sound harsh and distort at high volume. The onboard sound card has analogue outputs for connecting a 5.1-channel surround-sound set.

There's only one free PCI slot and one PCI Express x1 slot, which you can use to add peripherals such as a TV tuner or FireWire card. You won't

need to add wireless networking, though, as the Zoostorm Z-3305 comes with a 802.11g PCI card. This is an unexpected but welcome addition in such an inexpensive PC, but the wired Ethernet port doesn't support Gigabit Ethernet.

If the 250GB hard disk isn't big enough, you can add another to the free drive bay, and even create a RAID 0

or RAID 1 array if you want. There's also room for another optical drive. A memory card reader is already included but there aren't any FireWire ports. The warranty lasts for just one year, but it's onsite, so you shouldn't have to part with your PC if you need it repaired.

We like the Zoostorm for its low price, speedy dual-core processor and useful extras such as wireless networking. It's not quite as quick as other similarly specified PCs we've seen, but it's very affordable for a decent PC with Vista pre-installed.

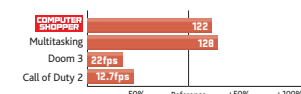
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Inexpensive
- ✓ Includes Vista Home Premium
- ✓ Generous hardware specification

DESKTOP PC 2.8GHz Intel Pentium D 820, 1GB RAM, 250GB hard disk, 256MB Nvidia GeForce 7600GS, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 17in LCD
SUPPLIER sales@pcnextday.co.uk
DETAILS www.pcnextday.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 54)



PC SYSTEMS

FAQ

Q What is Windows Vista's ReadyBoost feature? Is it something I should be using?

A ReadyBoost allows you to use a USB flash drive as a substitute for extra system RAM, but you need a drive that meets certain criteria. Read *How it Works* on page 160 for more information.

When you insert a flash drive into a Vista PC, it checks to see if it's fast enough to work with ReadyBoost. If it is, you can choose an amount of space to set aside for speeding up your system. Some manufacturers sell drives as being compatible with ReadyBoost, such as the Kingston 1GB DataTraveler ReadyFlash on page 12.

ReadyBoost will improve performance only when there's little or no physical RAM free, and the PC would otherwise begin to use the hard disk swapfile heavily. We will continue to test ReadyBoost as faster flash drives become available, but it's currently no substitute for real RAM if you want to speed up a Windows Vista computer.

Alan Lu

PC systems and storage expert

alan@computershopper.co.uk



Video page 34

Freecom DVB-T USB Stick	★★★★
Humax Duovision PVR-9200T	★★★★
Samsung BD-P1000	★★★★
Sling Media Slingbox	★★★★
Terratec Cinergy DT USB XS Diversity	★★★★
Toshiba HD-E1	★★★★

Audio page 36

Altec Lansing M602	★★★★
Apple iPod Shuffle	★★★★
iSymphony M2	★★★★
Logitech AudioStation	★★★★
Logitech X-230	★★★★
Logitech Z-5450	★★★★
Philips SLA5520	★★★★
Sansisk Sansa e270	★★★★
Terratec Noxon iRadio	★★★★

Networks page 38

Devolo DLAN 200 Avdesk Starter Kit	★★★★
D-Link RangeBooster N 650 Router	★★★★
D-Link Wireless 108G Gigabit QoS Router	★★★★
Linksys iPhone CIT300	★★★★
Philips Dual Phone VOIP 321	★★★★
TrendNet TV-IP301W	★★★★

Storage page 40

ATMT DW567	★★★★
HP dvd940e	★★★★
Samsung Super Writemaster SH-S182M	★★★★
Sweex Mobile Storage Solution	★★★★
TrekStor DataStation maxi tu	★★★★
Western Digital My Book Pro Edition 500GB	★★★★
Western Digital Passport 120GB	★★★★

Components page 42

Antec P150	★★★★
ECS PN2 SLI2+	★★★★
Foxconn N6857Aa	★★★★
Gigabyte GV-RX195P256D-RH	★★★★
Intel Core 2 Duo E6700	★★★★
MSI Crystal 945	★★★★
Sapphire X1950 GT	★★★★
Sapphire X1950 Pro AGP	★★★★
ZeroTherm CF800	★★★★

Software & Games page 46

Acronis True Image 10 Home	★★★★
Avanquest RadioTracker 2	★★★★
Battlestations: Midway	★★★★
Cakewalk Sonar 6 Producer Edition	★★★★
Citrix Online GoToMyPC 6	★★★★
Cloudmakr Desktop for Outlook	★★★★
Company of Heroes	★★★★
Diskeeper 2007 Home	★★★★
DriveSentry	★★★★
Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	★★★★
Europa Universalis III	★★★★
FIFA 2007	★★★★
FlatOut 2	★★★★
FX Home CompositeLab Pro	★★★★
FXHome EffectsLab Pro	★★★★
Magix Audio Cleaning Lab 11 XXL	★★★★
Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2007	★★★★
Microsoft Works Suite 2006	★★★★
Mozilla FireFox 2.0	★★★★
Mr Site Takeaway Website	★★★★
Notion Protege	★★★★
PDC World Championship Darts	★★★★
Sony Vegas Movie Studio +DVD Platinum Edition 6	★★★★
Supreme Commander	★★★★
Ulead DVD MovieFactory 6 Plus	★★★★
VirtualBox 1.3.6 for Windows Hosts	★★★★
Website Pros NetObjects Fusion 10	★★★★
World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade	★★★★

BYTE SIZE

KINGSTON DataTraveler ReadyFlash 1GB

★★★★★

£13 inc VAT

Kingston's DataTraveler ReadyFlash 1GB is optimised to work with Windows Vista ReadyBoost (see FAQ), which uses a flash drive to augment your PC's RAM. To test it we ran our benchmarks on a 512MB Vista PC, first without ReadyBoost, then with the DataTraveler. Without ReadyBoost the PC managed a score of 63, and with the DataTraveler it got 61, suggesting that ReadyBoost can actually slow down your PC.

However, in our small files test, the ReadyFlash wrote files at an impressive 0.85MB/s. Its read result of 6.52MB/s was only average, but it's still a good-value drive.

Chris Fynamore

SUPPLIER www.lambda-tek.com
DETAILS www.kingston.com

LOGITECH FreePulse Wireless Headphones

★★★★★

£50 inc VAT

Logitech's FreePulse Wireless Headphones are a set of behind-the-head headphones that come with a Bluetooth transmitter. This has a set of adaptors that let it sit snugly against any iPod, and an extension cable for plugging into any mini-jack audio output. The headphones communicate using Bluetooth 2.0, but you can't pair them with a regular Bluetooth dongle.

Sound quality is surprisingly good, if a little bass-heavy. Battery life is around six hours, but there's no way to plug the headphones in via a cable when you run out of juice.

The FreePulse Wireless Headphones can get a little uncomfortable after prolonged use, but this is otherwise a decent, well-priced set.

David Ludlow

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.logitech.co.uk

SHUTTLE mini X200M

★★★★★

£858 inc VAT

Shuttle's mini X200M is around the size of the old Nintendo Entertainment System games console, so it isn't as small as other compact computers such as Apple's Mac mini. The smallest mini PCs tend to use slim 2.5in notebook hard disks, but their relatively small capacity leaves little room for lots of files. However, the mini X200M's larger size means it has room for a 300GB 3.5in hard disk.

This means the X200M should have plenty of room to store episodes of your favourite TV shows, which you can record using the built-in TV tuner. It can receive either analogue or digital channels, but you can't watch one channel while recording another. To do that you'll have to add another tuner using USB.

You can browse your recorded shows, as well as photos and music, using Windows XP Media Center and the included remote. The infrared receiver for the remote is integrated into the X200M's case rather than using up a USB port. The remote's buttons are small and hard to press, however.

The X200M has a 1.6GHz Intel Core Duo processor and 1GB of RAM. It's not as fast as similarly priced but larger Core 2 Duo-equipped PCs, but it still got respectable scores in our video-editing and multiple-applications tests. It's suitable as a general-purpose computer or a media centre PC. Sadly, it isn't suitable for playing recent 3D games. The integrated Intel graphics chip couldn't run our Doom 3 or Call of Duty 2 tests, making it suitable only for games that are a few years old.



If the 300GB hard disk isn't spacious enough, replacing it is much easier than with other compact PCs. If you want to add more memory, however, you'll have to discard one or both of the two fitted 512MB RAM chips, as there are only two slots. Unsurprisingly for such a small PC, there aren't any PCI slots or spare drive bays.

This PC doesn't come with a monitor, mouse or keyboard, but there are other useful extras such as built-in wireless networking for connecting to your wireless router. Although there's only one DVI monitor port, you can hook up an additional D-sub display using the included splitter cable.

The Shuttle mini X200M is compact and quiet, comparatively easily to upgrade and comes with some useful extras. That said, PC Nextday's Zoostorm 6-5202 Lifestyle PC (see *What's New*, Shopper April 2007) is quicker in Windows applications and 3D games. It costs only a few pounds more and comes with a monitor, keyboard, mouse and speakers. It's not as small as the X200M, but unless you need only a base unit that's as small as possible, the Zoostorm is the better buy.

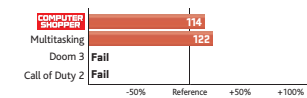
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Compact and quiet
- ✓ Built-in TV tuner and WiFi
- ✗ Expensive

DESKTOP PC 1.6GHz Intel Core Duo T2050, 1GB RAM, 300GB hard disk, Intel GMA 950 integrated graphics, DVD+/-RW DL, hybrid TV tuner
SUPPLIER www.shooboxcomputers.com
DETAILS <http://eu.shuttle.com/en>

PERFORMANCE (see page 54)



Also consider...

PCNEXTDAY Zoostorm 2-5404 Versatile PC

★★★★★

£732 inc VAT



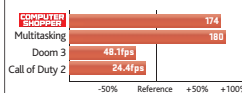
The Zoostorm case may be bland and awkward to open, but there's plenty of space inside for future upgrades. There's no case fan to expel warm air, so it's not particularly loud when in use. PC

Nextday has fitted a wireless network card, so it's easy to connect to a wireless broadband router if you have one.

This computer has a 2.13GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6400 processor. It performed well in our benchmarks with an overall score of 174. It also performed well in our 3D game tests. It managed



DESKTOP PC 2.13GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6400, 1GB RAM, 320GB hard disk, 256MB Nvidia GeForce 7600GT, DVD+/-RW +/- DL, DVD-ROM, 19in LCD
SUPPLIER sales@pcnextday.co.uk
DETAILS www.pcnextday.co.uk
✓ Performs well in 2D and 3D; three-year warranty
FULL REVIEW Mar 2007



48.1fps in Doom 3 and 24.4fps in Call of Duty 2, so it's fast enough for occasional gaming.

The 19in AOC monitor has no serious flaws. It exhibited good colour balance and contrast. PCNextday provides a three-year onsite warranty, helping to make the Zoostorm a great-value general-purpose PC with something for everyone.

EVESHAM

Solar Storm Plus

★★★★★

£1,049 inc VAT

Today's PCs are used for so many different tasks that it's difficult for manufacturers to keep everyone happy. This is particularly true for a family PC, but thankfully Evesham's Solar Storm Plus has something for almost everyone.

The Storm has a generous amount of RAM and a mid-range Intel Core 2 Duo processor. It scored an impressive 250 in our video-editing test and a speedy 192 in our image-manipulation test, so it's more than powerful enough for everyday Windows applications. Even processor- or memory-intensive jobs should be well within its capabilities.

We were impressed by the performance of the GeForce 7900GS graphics card in our 3D games tests. Its strong result in our Doom 3 benchmark shows that it shouldn't have any trouble playing current 3D games. Its less impressive – but still playable – score of 29.5fps in our Call of Duty 2 test shows that you'll need to lower the resolution or graphical detail for the highest frame rates on very demanding games.

You can use the Storm's dual digital TV tuner to record one channel while you watch another. Using the included remote and Vista Home Premium's Media Center, you can browse your recorded shows as well as your music and photos. If you play games or watch lots of movies, you'll want to add a set of surround-sound speakers, but the included Creative i-Trigue 3220 set is fine for listening to music.

Pictures, films and games look good on the large, widescreen ViewSonic monitor. Its 1,680x1,050 resolution is ideal for working on panoramic photos or for comparing



two Office documents side by side. White areas are bright and evenly lit while other colours are rich and deep. There was only minor coarseness in our greyscale and colour gradient tests. The stand's tilt motion feels a bit stiff, but you can swivel the monitor effortlessly.

There's plenty of room for upgrades inside the case, with space for another two optical drives and four more hard disks, as well as five spare SATA sockets for connecting them. The two FireWire 400 ports and an eSATA port are useful for adding external storage, and Evesham supplies this computer with a handy 4GB Kingston flash drive for backing up files. One of the two empty PCI slots is squeezed up against the PCI

Express x16 slot, however, so fitting a card in both could prove difficult.

Evesham's Solar Storm is fast in Windows and games. It has a good-quality, high-resolution display and a dual TV tuner, so it's perfect for a wide range of users. However, if you don't need to please everyone, you may be able to get a more specialised PC for less. Mesh's Elite E6600 Express (see *What's New, Shopper*, January 2007) doesn't have a TV tuner or such a good screen, but it's faster, comes with better speakers and costs £65 less.

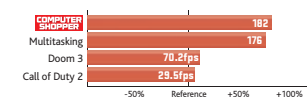
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Dual digital TV tuner
- ✓ High-res, good-quality display
- ✗ Pricier than faster alternatives

DESKTOP PC 2.13GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6400, 2GB RAM, 320GB hard disk, 256MB Nvidia GeForce 7900GS, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 20in widescreen LCD
SUPPLIER Evesham 08701 609500
DETAILS www.evesham.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 54)



BYTE SIZE

REVO
Sex Drive★
£27 inc VAT

Revo's Sex Drive is a 1GB USB flash disk with encryption software. Rather than using passwords, you click on a sequence of erotic pictures. If you think this sounds like an exercise in pointless titillation, you're right.

The encryption software is awful and can be registered only on a single PC, completely removing the benefit of using a flash drive to transport files. Selecting a sequence of images is confusing and a lot slower than typing a password.

As the same flash disk can be bought without software for £15, the Sex Drive is just an expensive way of getting some tacky porn and almost useless encryption software. There's simply no need for it.

David Ludlow

SUPPLIER Revo 01206 307999
DETAILS www.revodrive.com

TECH AIR
Series 5 5902★★★★★
£59 inc VAT

Tech Air's 'Weekender' Series 5 5902 is a small, wheeled suitcase that has plenty of room for your notebook and clothes. The removable notebook pouch is accessed through the side, so you don't have to unpack to get at it, and can take a 15in widescreen notebook. It contains a carry-handle laptop bag, so you can take this when you don't need the entire case.

The main pouch is expandable to give it a couple of inches of extra depth, and with a notebook tucked away there's enough room for three or four nights away.

The garish colours won't be to everyone's taste, but the 5902 is otherwise an incredibly useful and tough bag for those who want to take only one case when they go away for short trips.

David Ludlow

SUPPLIER www.pcwb.co.uk
DETAILS www.techair.co.uk

APPLE
24in iMac

★★★★★

£1,349 inc VAT



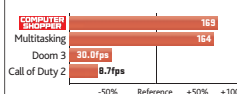
Apple's latest iMac has a huge 24in widescreen monitor. Like all iMacs, the computer is encased behind the display so it doesn't take up much more space than a standalone LCD. Despite its size, it's easy to tilt and swivel.

The widescreen display isn't glossy, but it's extremely bright. It's perfect for watching movies, even from across a small room. The spacious 1,920x1,200 resolution is ideal for manipulating large photos or watching high-definition 1,080p videos.

The iMac did well in our benchmarks, which we ran under Windows XP. It was strong in our video-encoding and multiple-application tests, so it should be able to handle strenuous computing tasks easily.



DESKTOP COMPUTER 2.16GHz Intel Core 2 Duo T7400, 1GB RAM, 250GB hard disk, 128MB nVidia GeForce 7300GT, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 24in widescreen LCD
PART CODE MA456B/A
SUPPLIER www.johnlewis.com
DETAILS www.apple.com/uk
✓ Attractive design with huge high-resolution screen
✗ Underpowered graphics chip
FULL REVIEW Jan 2007



Unfortunately, its GeForce 7300GT graphics card isn't suited for playing the latest, most demanding games. There's no TV tuner or memory card reader, but a remote control, good-quality webcam and useful software bundle are included.

The 24in iMac isn't suitable for gamers, but it's still an impressive and slim all-in-one computer.

BYTE SIZE



GENIUS Slimstar R610

★★★★

£31 inc VAT

The mouse from this wireless keyboard and mouse set has a slot in which you can store the small USB wireless receiver. Though it's full sized, this makes it convenient to use as a travel mouse. It is powered by a single rechargeable AA battery, but Genius supplies two. These come with a USB charger, which also has a port for the USB receiver, so you need only one USB port for the mouse, charger and keyboard.

The keyboard uses two AAA batteries, and is stiffly sprung. Its built-in scroll wheel could prove useful when navigating long documents. The mouse and rechargeable batteries are useful but we prefer Microsoft's Optical Desktop 1000 (*Labs*, Shopper April 2007).

Seth Barton

SUPPLIER Tek 08701 994344
DETAILS www.geniusnet.co.uk

SWEEX Virtual 5.1 USB 2.0 Vibration Headset

★★★

£16 inc VAT

You're less likely to be interrupted if you play games at night, but the sound could disturb others. Sweex's Virtual 5.1 USB 2.0 Vibration Headset aims to provide surround-sound that won't wake the neighbours. It plugs into a USB port, so you don't need a sound card, but you do need to install drivers to enable surround-sound.

With no manual, it's not easy to work out how the configuration applet works, and it wouldn't let us configure multiple sound channels.

This headset is affordable, but doesn't produce effective surround-sound. We'd be happier with a pair of quality stereo headphones.

Simon Handby

SUPPLIER www.mx2.co.uk
DETAILS www.sweex.co.uk

CHOOSING A... PC System

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

PROCESSOR Intel Pentium D 820
MEMORY 1GB
HARD DISK 250GB
STORAGE 16x DVD writer
SOUND Integrated
SPEAKERS Stereo
GRAPHICS Integrated
MONITOR 19in LCD
EXTRAS 56K modem
CONNECTORS 4x USB2, network
SOFTWARE Windows Vista Home Premium
BASICS Keyboard, mouse
Recommended minimum in grey

1 The minimum specification of PC we recommend, shown in grey above, is a good starting point when working out your ideal system. This PC would cost around £500 and is perfectly capable of running everyday office, multimedia or education software, as well as doing anything on the internet. But it's an unexciting PC. It will be able to play DVD movies, but they won't sound too impressive and modern games are a no-no.

2 The size and shape of a PC is more important than it used to be. A mini PC costs a bit more and it's less upgradable, but it will take up less desk space and look much more attractive. If you're choosing a media centre PC, make sure you get one that fits in with any other electronic equipment in your living room and that it's quiet.

3 Interested in games? Upgrade to a decent graphics card. Budget cards based on the GeForce 7300 GT graphics processor or Radeon X1600 will cope with this year's games, but to play next year's just as smoothly (and enjoy gorgeous graphics today), you'll want anything up to a GeForce 7950 GX2 or Radeon X1900XTX.

Look for an SLI or CrossFire system if you want to use two graphics cards to get the best graphics performance. Even if you don't want SLI or CrossFire now, it may be worth getting a system that's capable of being upgraded later.

4 The processor above is powerful and it's dual core, so it will handle intensive tasks. If you're going to be doing a lot of video editing, you should consider upgrading to an even more powerful processor. Intel's Core 2 Duo range is our current top choice; as well as being more powerful, it needs less cooling so your PC should be quieter.

5 If you're not interested in games, you can definitely live with integrated or cheap graphics, but there are plenty more reasons to upgrade the memory, hard disk or processor. If you'll be using your PC for serious desktop publishing, music or photo-editing tasks, you need the same kind of processor, memory and disk space as for games. For video editing consider getting two hard disks, perhaps in a RAID array.

6 A quality sound system will enhance all manner of PC activities. To hear the surround

soundtrack of a DVD at its best, you'll need a quality 5.1 speaker system. Games can also use such a system to throw sound effects around you. If you're not interested in games or DVDs (or you don't want to trail wires all around the room), go for a quality stereo pair with a subwoofer to boost the bass instead.

If you're interested in music or want better-quality sound, you'll need to invest in a dedicated sound card. As well as providing enhanced sound, such as Environmental Audio eXtension (EAX), which tweaks the acoustics to make sound appear to be playing in different environments, you'll get higher-quality outputs and more inputs.

7 A 17in LCD is standard but not very exciting and quite small. A 19in LCD costs around £50 more and has the same resolution (1,280x1,024) but is easier on the eye. Twenty-inch LCDs are available from £300 and have a higher resolution (1,600x1,200). These are better for those who want to edit large photos, documents or spreadsheets, run two applications side by side, or just look important.

If you're more interested in entertainment, consider a widescreen monitor. As well as being ideally suited for watching movies, they give you more room horizontally, so you can work on two documents side by side.

Decide if you want a glossy display or not. Glossy displays improve contrast and make images look brighter, but they reflect overhead lights and sunlight easily, making them hard to work with.

8 The standard set of connectors can be improved with extra USB2 ports, to which most run-of-the-mill PC gadgets attach, and a FireWire port for fancy gadgets including most digital video (DV) cameras. Look for a memory card reader if you have a digital camera and make sure your camera's memory card is supported.

9 Windows XP Home Premium is preinstalled on most new PCs. Any extra software bundled should be assessed critically. It may be that you'll never use it. But you may happen across a PC that includes software you'd otherwise have paid for; you'll save lots of money by having it preloaded, although you won't get technical support included.

10 If you have money left over, consider a TV card. This lets you watch TV on your PC screen and record programmes to your hard disk, or capture analogue video from a camcorder.

